

FORUM LETTER

Volume 40 Number 10

October 2011

God's account of man

Inside this issue:

From the archives

Omnium gatherum



And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

[Genesis 6:5] How widely different is this from the fair pictures of

6 human nature which men have drawn in all ages! The writings of many of the ancients abound with gay descriptions of the dignity of man; whom some of them paint as having all virtue and happiness in his composition, or, at least, entirely in his power, without being beholden to any other being; yea, as self-sufficient, able to live on his own stock, and little inferior to God himself. Nor have Heathens alone, men who are guided in their researches by little more than the dim light of reason, but many likewise of them that bear the name of Christ, and to whom are entrusted the oracles of God, spoken as magnificently concerning the nature of man, as if it were all innocence and perfection. . . . Is it any wonder, that these accounts are very readily received by the generality of men? For who is not easily persuaded to think favourably of himself? Accordingly, writers of this kind are most universally read, admired, applauded. And innumerable are the converts they have made, not only in the gay, but the learned world. So that it is now quite unfashionable to talk otherwise, to say any thing to the disparagement of human nature; which is generally allowed, notwithstanding a few infirmities, to be very innocent, and wise, and virtuous! But, in the mean time, what must we do with our Bibles? . . . These accounts, however pleasing to flesh and blood, are utterly irreconcilable with the scriptural. The Scripture avers, that "by one man's disobedience all men were constituted sinners"; . . . that every man may say, "I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did my mother conceive me"; . . . And hence, when "the Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, he saw they were all gone out of the way; they were altogether become abominable, there was none righteous, no, not one," none that truly sought after God. . . . This is God's account of man.—John Wesley, "Sermon XXXVIII: Original Sin" (*Wesley's Standard Sermons*, ed. Edward Sugden, Epworth Press, 1921), II:207ff.

The American
Lutheran Publicity
Bureau is on the web
www.alpb.org

FORUM LETTER is published monthly by the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (www.alpb.org) with LUTHERAN FORUM, a quarterly journal, in a combined subscription for \$27.45 (U.S.) a year, \$49.95 (U.S.) for two years, in the United States and Canada. Retirees and students, \$22.00 a year. Add \$8.00 per year for Canadian, \$12.00 for overseas delivery. Write to the Subscription Office for special rates for groups. Single copy, \$2.50.

Editor: Pr. Richard O. Johnson
<roj@nccn.net>

Associate Editor: Pr. Peter Speckhard
<pspeckhard@hotmail.com>

Member: Associated Church Press.

EDITORIAL OFFICE: P. O. Box 1394,
Grass Valley, CA 95945 <roj@nccn.net>

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICE: American
Lutheran Publicity Bureau, P. O. Box 327,
Delhi, NY 13753-0327 <dkralpb@aol.com>
Telephone 607-746-7511. Postage paid at
Delhi, NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address
to P. O. Box 327, Delhi, NY 13753-0327.

Copyright © 2011 by the American
Lutheran Publicity Bureau.
ISSN 0046-4732

Orlando: everything is under control



Very few people expected that the 2011 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America would make a lot of headlines, and so very few were disappointed. It seemed to be

pretty much expected from the get-go (even by ELCA leaders) that there wouldn't be much news from Orlando. One sign of this was the virtual disappearance of any provision for media relations. This was the fourth assembly I've covered, and always in the past there has been a staffed media room with a variety of re-

sources available. There has been an opening press conference with the presiding bishop, and other press conferences throughout the assembly with various ELCA leaders and guests. There has been a staff person who made sure that media representatives had everything they might need. There have been regular press releases from the ELCA News Service.

This time, though, none of the above. There was a media room, but it was locked throughout most of the assembly. There were no press conferences, at least that I heard about. As *FL* reported recently, long-time Director of Media Relations John Brooks left for another job this summer; in charge of the assembly was Melissa Ramirez Cooper, who was always helpful if asked anything, but not as proactive as Brooks. And the entire assembly merited only four news releases (one of which was on the winners of the very important and newsworthy LivingLutheran.com video contest). To understand the significance of that number, you should know that the 2009 Churchwide Assembly prompted 52 releases from the ELCA News Service (and really only a handful of those were about sexuality).

Does anybody care?

Of course the ELCA's financial situation is in part to blame for this downsizing of the public relations machine; news writers get the big bucks, you know. But part of it also is that nobody seemed to care much about what this assembly was doing, or that it was even meeting. I was told that only five media credentials had been issued—one was for *Forum Letter*, three for *The Lutheran*, and one for the local Orlando newspaper religion writer (who, far as I could tell, never showed up).

There was, it is only fair to say, a series of online "assembly news and updates," and perhaps these were meant to take the place of extensive press releases. Their brevity and informality made it clear that these summaries (blogs, really) were primarily addressed to the ELCA constituency, and not to the wider media. (You can view them at <http://blogs.elca.org/assemblynews/>.)

No embracing of evolution

If there were only four press releases, then let's presume that these covered what the ELCA staff saw as the "most significant" issues, and hit them first. One was the social statement on genetics.

Apparently not anticipating much controversy, the statement wasn't debated until Thursday morning (the next to last day; it had been formally "presented" earlier in the week). And indeed, there wasn't much controversy.

A handful of amendments were proposed, but none were adopted. The most interesting would have changed the sentence "This church recognizes and embraces the theoretical frameworks on which the science of genetics rests" to "This church recognizes and embraces evolution as the scientifically valid framework on which the study of genetics rests." Having had quite enough of controversial headlines, the assembly in the end decided that embracing evolution was probably not going to be helpful, and rejected the proposal by a vote of 934-51. Of course with no media present, there may not have been many headlines, but who knows what might leak out?

Brand new malaria campaign

A second news release touted the adoption of the ELCA Malaria Initiative, a campaign to raise \$15 million over a four-year period for work to eradicate malaria. "It is Lutheran relationships of accompaniment that bring us to this moment of launching the ELCA Malaria Campaign. The world is calling us together, to this moment, to this effort, because of our relationships—church to church, people to God," said Pr. Andrea DeGroot-Nesdahl, coordinator of the campaign. The assembly enthusiastically approved the campaign by a vote of 968 to 19.

Left entirely unmentioned in the presentation was the decision of the ELCA, in October, 2010, to withdraw from the Lutheran Malaria Initiative (LMI)—the program that was endorsed even more overwhelmingly (989 to 11) by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly. The only faint allusion to LMI was a comment by DeGroot-Nesdahl that "there are other denominations in this effort."

That "course change" had been explained—for the first time publically, as far as I can tell—in the assembly preliminary material. After citing the action of the 2009 assembly, the report went on to say that the decision to withdraw from LMI was made because "mission support and other funding to the churchwide organization had declined significantly." Almost as an afterthought, it complained that the earlier campaign, which partnered with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), Lu-

theran World Relief (LWR), and the United Nations Foundation, would have required a division of funds that the ELCA found problematic—an interesting point, since presumably that division of funds had been agreed to even before the 2009 Churchwide Assembly was asked to endorse LMI.

But no one asked any questions about this; and with some 65% of the voting members there for the first time, a large majority were not among those who so enthusiastically endorsed LMI two years ago. Ironically, the ELCA is still connected to LMI through its membership in LWR. But officially, ELCA eggs are all in the basket of the ELCA Malaria Campaign—which, in the words of the Church Council, is simply a “re-branded and prioritized” effort. With much encouragement, many of those at the assembly joined the “leadership circle,” pledging more than \$239,000 toward the campaign.

Living and LIFTing Lutherans

Throughout the assembly, finalists in the LivingLutheran.com video contest were shown. There were entries from congregations and individuals, the purpose being a reflection on what it means to “live Lutheran.” Some of these were quite well-done and provocative, some funny, some clearly with an agenda—all of them interesting glimpses into Lutheran identity “on the ground.” You can see the winning entries (and others) at www.livinglutheran.com/contest.

Apparently not worth its own news release, but buried in, of all things, the story on genetics was the approval of the Living into the Future Together (LIFT) recommendations. (Of course since this task force talked a lot about the “ecology” of the ELCA, maybe the connection to genetics had some kind of logic.) These were very extensive and complex, and were adopted with only minor changes. The major points: a change in the schedule of churchwide assemblies (every three years, instead of biennially, starting after the 2013 assembly); some changes in the membership of the Church Council to “ensure diversity and expertise”; elimination of some separate “program boards” with their responsibilities given to the Church Council; creation of some “non-legislative forums and events” to “foster leadership development and enhance the interdependence of this church” (quotes from the official summary of actions).

Constitutional tinkering

There was the usual collection of proposed constitutional amendments, most of which were approved *en bloc*. The one that was pulled out for separate consideration was that troublesome proposal perceived by some as making it more difficult for a congregation to withdraw from the ELCA by requiring, for example, a six month period for reflection after a vote to leave has failed before another vote can be taken. There was a little bit of debate about this, but let’s face it: those still contemplating leaving the ELCA were not well-represented here, and the proposed amendment was overwhelmingly approved.

What remains to be seen, of course, is whether this change can actually be foisted on a congregation that doesn’t agree with it. Some have argued (as the ELCA does) that when the churchwide assembly changes the model constitution for congregations, the changes automatically apply to every congregation. Others (including *Forum Letter*) have maintained that such a change without the congregation’s agreement would be hard to enforce in a court of law. Until some congregation resists, we won’t really know the answer.

Those who have left

So that’s the “news,” such as it is, from the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. Now for some more subjective observations.

One question I raised prior to the assembly was, “How will the assembly address the loss of hundreds of congregations and tens of thousands of individual members since 2009?” (*FL*, July, 2011). The answer is that it wasn’t addressed much at all. The primary reference to it came in Secretary David Swartling’s report, which told us that 517 congregations have left. The most affected synods, he said have been Southwestern Texas (16% of its congregations gone) and Western Iowa (13%); six others have lost 10% or more, while seven synods have lost none or one.

Of these, his calculations show that 61% have joined Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), while 31% have joined the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). The rest have joined other church bodies. These figures are a little deceptive, because some of these church bodies allow dual affiliation.

Swartling then went on to make what some

thought a rather ungracious comment, that more than half of the departing congregations are in small towns, and their leaving raises serious questions about their long-term viability without the infrastructure of the ELCA. One NALC official noted, in response, that the average membership of both NALC and LCMC congregations is actually larger than that of ELCA congregations.

Accentuating the positive

Swartling was quick to go on to more positive statements about the ELCA's strength and viability. In this, he was joining the theme song of the week. Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, in his report, said he is "more hopeful and grateful" for the ELCA than he has ever been. "We are a church with clarity about who we are and about our shared commitment to being engaged in God's mission for the life of the world. . . . This is Christ's church. There is a place for you here. You are welcome here." This is clearly the message that ELCA leadership wanted to give to and through this assembly: We've been through some tough times, but now we are clear about who we are and where we are going.

Under control

Another observation: This assembly was the most tightly controlled and scripted that I have ever seen. Or maybe I'm just seeing things more clearly. I had the opportunity at a couple of points to see what was happening on the teleprompter, and was somewhat surprised to see that even some seemingly "off the cuff" comments by the presiding bishop were prepared ahead of time. Don't get me wrong; Bp. Hanson is a gifted presider and there's little question that he's good on his feet. But sometimes what appears spontaneous is actually carefully prepared in advance.

More significant is the fact that the agenda was very much controlled. As in many ELCA assemblies, there is a Reference and Counsel Committee to which virtually anything a voting member may want to do is submitted. So, for example, if a voting member wanted to propose an amendment to the social statement on genetics, that amendment had to go to Reference and Counsel, which then recommended whether the assembly should even consider it, and if so, what action it should take. It was possible to get around this to a degree, but it required a

2/3 vote to do so. There was no such thing, on important matters, as a genuine motion to amend coming spontaneously from the floor. The result is that there was virtually no significant action taken by the assembly that was not essentially what was proposed by the various committees and task forces. "Rubber stamp" wouldn't be too far from accurate.

The influence of newbies

Of course this is to be expected in an assembly that is 65% first-timers. I talked to one veteran participant/observer of all the churchwide assemblies since the ELCA's establishment. He noted that the number of first time voting members here was higher than usual. Not a lot higher; he estimated that the usual figure was around 62%. But enough higher, he said, to make a difference in how willing the assembly was to challenge, to amend, to question. I heard more than one voting member wonder whether the \$4 million it allegedly costs to hold an assembly was really a wise expenditure of limited funds.

It all depends, one might say, on just what the purpose is of a churchwide assembly. If the purpose is actually to legislate for the church, then it would seem that voting members with a bit more corporate experience might be a good thing. Add the 65% newbie figure to the 60% laity quota, and you've got a bunch of people who, good-hearted and faithful though they may be, are perhaps not the best ones to be making decisions. I have to admit I was a little startled to encounter two pastors I know who were voting members, each of whom has been ordained fewer than three years (one of them only a year). Maybe there's some benefit to that, especially in synods with very large delegations; one has to wonder, however, just how much churchly wisdom is represented by such inexperience.

The more recent encouragement of youth and young adults was also evident; it seemed like every issue had young people at the microphone making comments or motions. A couple of them would have been well-advised to speak a little less frequently. (Full disclosure: this reporter was a delegate to a national church meeting at age 21, and no doubt went to the mike entirely too many times.)

The "rally the troops" model

But if the purpose is to rally the troops, to

promote the program and ministry of the ELCA, then it would be fine if none of the voting members had ever been there before—provided, of course, they were carefully chosen for their ability to go home and gush about what a wonderful church we have. The “rally the troops” model actually seemed to be quite a bit in evidence; one whole afternoon was taken, not for business and debate, but for “Mission Encounter” where the voting members were divided into smaller groups and given presentations (often video) about interesting mission and ministry projects.

Or consider that the only “hearings” on the agenda took place on Monday, before the opening of the assembly. Some voting members no doubt attended one, but probably more did not; so what the majority knew about the business being conducted was what they read in the preliminary reports and what they heard from the podium. That doesn’t leave a lot of opportunity for asking questions, especially hard questions.

Little interest from interest groups

In addition to the paucity of media, there were many, many fewer visitors this year than in recent assemblies. The “interest groups” were notably lacking. Goodsoil (the “full inclusion of sexual minorities” folks) was there, but not nearly in the “in your face” fashion of the past few years. Not many rainbow buttons, no protest songs in the hall.

Lutheran CORE (the “traditionalists”) was virtually invisible. There was a room, miles (it seemed) from the convention hall, where they had some literature. The room was hard to find, and apparently it was made more difficult because the signs directing people to the room kept disappearing. (I say “apparently,” though I heard someone on the Goodsoil side say “allegedly.”)

Mark Chavez, the director of CORE, told me that a few folks had, nonetheless, wandered over there. “I’ve actually been doing more pastoral care than anything else,” he commented wistfully. With Chavez having been appointed General Secretary of the NALC, it may well be that Lutheran CORE will pretty much fade away, leaving more traditionalist ELCA Lutherans without an organized voice.

Tit for tat

One other assembly matter of note: It has

been traditional for the national gatherings of the ELCA and the LCMS to have a leader from the other body present to bring greetings. Last time around then-LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick was rather forthright in his criticism of the ELCA’s direction on human sexuality; some were wondering if the presumably more conservative President Matthew Harrison would be even more so.

But President Harrison was not present. Representing the LCMS was First Vice-president Herbert Mueller. “Representing,” however, in a rather minimalist sense. He did not address the assembly, but was simply one among a dozen or so “ecumenical guests” paraded across the stage.

According to ELCA sources, this was a decision made some time ago, and was at least in part due to the fact that ELCA Secretary David Swartling, who represented the ELCA at the LCMS convention last summer, was not given time to address the convention. Maybe that sort of tit for tat makes sense in the realm of international relations, though it seems a strange response among Christians.

That melancholy feeling

Nonetheless, there was a bit of misunderstanding here because this was not communicated clearly to Dr. Mueller ahead of time, and he came to Orlando not knowing whether or not he would be speaking. This was certainly not a deliberate slight, and there were apologies all around for the miscommunication. Dr. Mueller subsequently recast the substance of what would have been his remarks had he been invited to speak, and posted it at <http://www.wmltblog.org/> (scroll down to August 29). “What gave me a persistent melancholy feeling observing this Churchwide Assembly,” Mueller writes, “is the sense that the ELCA is simply on a different course than the LCMS, particularly with regard to the authority of Scripture.”

Dr. Mueller’s comments also address the future of cooperation between ELCA and LCMS. Noting that the LCMS has begun a process of examining all such areas of cooperation, he writes that “where we conclude the differences make cooperation impossible, there will, in time, be a careful and orderly disengagement.” The truth—and it is melancholy indeed—is that not only cooperation but even dialogue seems to have about run its course between the two large Lutheran bodies in the United States.

Striving for dialogue

On another front, however, there are efforts on the part of some to begin dialogue with the North American Lutheran Church. A motion was submitted to Reference and Counsel that the ELCA through the Office of the Presiding Bishop's Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations invite dialogue with the NALC to strive for a mutual relationship, where possible, for both the ELCA and the NALC." The committee decided to recommend the resolution, with one word change—they wanted to say "and strive" rather than "to strive." The difference may seem minor, but the proposer of the motion didn't think so, and he moved that his original wording be restored. When asked why, he gave one of the more memorable lines of the assembly: "Because it's grammatically correct."

The assembly agreed, and adopted his original wording, so the ELCA is now committed to seeking ways to work with the NALC. It's a pity that this motion had to come from the floor, rather than from, say, the Church Council or the bishops. Perhaps at the very least the assembly's overwhelming ap-

proval (841-74) will encourage some bishops to review policies like banning NALC pastors, or pastors in the process of moving to the NALC, from doing pulpit supply in ELCA congregations.

Time will tell

Only time will tell whether this assembly truly marks a "turning the corner" for the ELCA after a couple of decades of strife over sexuality issues, and a rebirth of energy and purpose. For all the hoopla, that seems a bit optimistic. Staff reductions, budget cuts, disengagement from previous partners—none of this sounds very promising. The road ahead continues to look a little rocky.

But then these are tough times for most denominations, and for all her troubles, the ELCA is, as Bishop Hanson said, "Christ's church." Or at least it is one representation of Christ's church. What the future holds is really more up to Christ than to assemblies and bishops and structures. And that's a good thing for all of us.

--by Richard O. Johnson, editor

From the archives: A pile of poofter



Editor's Note: This year Forum Letter celebrates 40 years of publication. We continue our series reprinting some tidbit from an earlier issue, something both of historical interest and contemporary applicability. This month's selection comes from the July 1997 issue, where editor Russell Saltzman noted two rather different discussions of marriage in Lutheran magazines, and made quite clear what he thought of one of them.

Must be something to do with June, brides and all, that accounts for the two feature stories on marriage in two very different Lutheran magazines last month. Call them a study in contrasts, conservative confessionalism compared to *laissez-faire* mainline morality. There is the Wisconsin Synod's *Northwestern Lutheran* with an article on choosing a spouse. Then there is the ELCA's *Lutheran* with an article on just living together. In the *Northwestern Lutheran*, author Linda R. Baacke, senior assistant at the magazine, sets forth a simple but compelling agenda for seeking a Christian spouse, and, after

marriage, what to do with the one you found. Most unusual these days, she clearly writes out of a foundational understanding that would describe marriage between Christians (and Christian celibacy) in vocational terms, as gift and calling, about which more in a moment.

Rounding up the pro's and no's

The Lutheran, by contrast, has "Living Together: Couples Share Why They Didn't and Do." Written by assistant editor Jeff Favre, the piece employs the ELCA's typical method in doing moral discourse. [It] rounds up a cast of No's and Pro's, lets them both say a few things, and then gives the last word to the Pro's. Of the No's, a married couple frowns on living together and describes it as "playing house." They assert that live-togethers lack commitment. "If there's no long-term commitment," the woman is quoted, "you can just leave." A pastor is brought on-board to echo the same complaint, that "too many people want privileges without responsibilities." Living together misplaces "the

unique thing about marriage—commitment.” So much for the No’s. Then the Pro’s have their turn—a couple living together, says the article, who “believe that a church ceremony and legal marriage ties would not improve what they have.” “It’s a legal bind,” says the male half about marriage. “It has a lot more to do with government and law than it does with the love of God.”

After the couples have their say, an expert is trotted out for a few summary paragraphs, in this instance a counselor with the University of Minnesota campus ministry. “When I prepare [couples for marriage],” *The Lutheran* quotes her, “I find it easier to talk to those who have lived together because they know what it takes to live with another human being. I see much more openness to share things that have been struggles.” To which the only possible reply is, “Oh, pish.”

Stodgy cake

(We note just as an aside that the best and more prominent photograph in the article is that of the live-together couple, smiling broadly as they happily share kitchen chores. The married couple, posing behind a stodgy wedding cake, is given a grainy photo about one-quarter the size of the other.) (We won’t say anything at all about the friendly sidebar on same-sex blessings.)

What is evident from *The Lutheran’s* piece is the inflated if not exalted notion of personal commitment. Commitment? Sure, but commitment by whom to whom? The married couple says, we got commitment. The unmarried couple says, we got commitment too. If it is commitment you want, right, all God’s children got commitment. The pastor quoted in the piece is off slightly. Commitment is not the unique thing about marriage. . . . If marriage versus living together simply represents two sides of the same commitment coin, as *The Lutheran’s* piece implies, then we still face the question of what constitutes the advantage of Christian marriage. *The Lutheran* does nothing at all to answer that. As a Christian magazine, with a Christian editor at the helm, it should have. . . .

Task and joy

But what, then, marks Christian marriage from all other arrangements? It is the Name of him in whom the Christian vocation of marriage is un-

dertaken that makes Christian marriage distinct, so man and woman in their service to Christ may be of service to themselves and to the world. The blessings of any marriage (or merely living together) cannot be located in the couple’s commitment to each other, nor in the way they get along in the kitchen or the bedroom, nor even in the ways the kids are raised—though one prays that all couples do these things well.

What is distinctive for Christians, though, is their joint life begun together in the name of Christ, mutual lives that rely upon daily repentance, daily forgiveness of sin, daily renewal of marriage vows—done, as Christians do, in the Name they have claimed for themselves in their life together. By undertaking a vocation in Christ’s name, the married couple seeks to do in their home what the Church seeks to do in the world: to be the visible love of God for their community, to make the reality of redemption evident in the lives they touch and nurture. Finally, that is the call and public purpose of every Christian marriage. And that is exactly the call that goes unheeded when one of the live-ins quoted in *The Lutheran* says, “At this point, emotionally, spiritually, mentally there is nothing I could gain from marriage that I don’t already have.” Oh? How about the task and joy and obligation—the duty and delight—of serving Christ through the public vocation of marriage?

Generally clueless

Your editor is not unaware that not every marriage begun in Christ’s name ends that way. Easy divorce law renders one spouse helpless if the other wishes to end the marriage, and an adversarial legal system quite easily has both spouses at each other’s throat, whether both will it or not. This has led your editor to sometimes speculate if there should not be a thing called “Christian divorce,” and wonder what it would look like if there were. Certainly, there are few resources within the church that are of any aid to couples who must divorce. But all that is another topic, another day. As to this topic, we shall generalize and say, *The Lutheran* is clueless about Christian marriage versus “Christian” living together if all it can produce is a pile of poofster like “some do, and some don’t.”

Omnium gatherum



Searching for a book • I didn't know this, but apparently back in the days of yore (ca. 1967) the predecessors of Augsburg Fortress published a "text only" edition of the *Service Book and Hymnal*, smaller than the standard music edition but larger than the pocket edition. Pastor Ron Marshall is trying to find a copy. If you have one, or have a lead on one, he'd really like you to let him know at deogloria@foxinternet.com.

Speaking of which • Speaking of Augsburg Fortress, it was interesting to see their "store" at the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. As you probably know, AF has pretty much abandoned the business of bringing books to synod assemblies and other events, but apparently the churchwide version still merits attention. It was, however, a disappointing display. They mostly appeared to be hawking curriculum of one sort or another. The real books were pretty limited in number and in scope. I wonder if Concordia Publishing House would consider asking for display space at future assemblies?

Too many meetings • It was a summer of church conventions—ELCA, NALC, ELCIC, WELS, and who knows what else. We've always covered ELCA and LCMS, and last time I promised we'd try to cover WELS in the future. We'll have a report on the NALC convention—would have been this month, but I was too long-winded about the ELCA. Next month, I promise, and then we'll be done with convention coverage for a while.

Presidential politics • After my mention of the WELS debate over Biblical translation, I received a tongue-in-cheek (I think) e-mail from a reader, opining that our WELS coverage should include commentary on Michelle Bachmann's alleged departure from WELS over its belief that the papacy is the Antichrist. He says it would be more interesting than reading about WELS's *angst* over the NIV. More interesting, maybe, but in my opinion Congresswoman Bachmann has already had more than her required fifteen minutes of fame, and that's as far as I'm going to wade into presidential politics of the secular variety.

OK, then • Usually being married to a public school kindergarten teacher involves cutting things out and stapling things together during our quality time together. Recently there was a more challenging task. The school district decreed that all classes must do a September lesson on the U. S. Constitution. (September 17 is Constitution Day, in case you missed it.) One of the "K-3" lesson plans we found on the internet suggested making a poster of the preamble for the children's reference. Many of these children, keep in mind, are four years old and have been in school for three weeks now. If this mindset were ever to infect the church, we'd be seeing curriculum for the kindergarten Sunday School class teaching them about the Formula of Concord. Or maybe—it wouldn't surprise me—CPH already offers that?

—roj

Address Service Requested

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MASON CITY, IA 50402
ALPB

AMERICAN LUTHERAN PUBLICITY BUREAU
LUTHERAN FORUM / FORUM LETTER
POST OFFICE BOX 327
DELHI, NY 13753-0327